

REVIEW ARTICLE

Text as a Tool for Understanding the Self: A Literature Review between Hermeneutics (Gadamer) and Cultural Psychoanalysis

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Abstract

Gadamer views the text as an open hermeneutical space for dialogue, in which the self is understood through the fusion of historical and linguistic horizons. Understanding is not a purely individual act but rather a dialectical process between the reader and the text, mediated by history and language. Meanwhile, proponents of cultural-psychological analysis regard the text as a symbolic tool for organizing consciousness. Words, narrative, and writing are not mere reflections of the self but mediating instruments that reshape it internally, since the text activates higher psychological functions—thinking, memory, and self-awareness—through cultural mediation and social interaction. Both perspectives reject an individualistic conception of the self: for Gadamer, understanding is realized historically and linguistically; for cultural psychology, it is realized functionally through symbolic mediation. Thus, the text encompasses two complementary dimensions: one philosophical-hermeneutical, and the other cultural-psychological.

Keywords: Text, Self, Hermeneutics, Gadamer, Analysis, Tool.

Introduction

The text constitutes one of the most important media in which philosophy and psychology intersect in their attempts to understand the human self. In philosophical studies, we find Gadamer, within his hermeneutics, emphasizing that self-understanding can only be achieved through texts that engage in their interpretation within a historical-cultural horizon. In cultural psychology, particularly within the ideas of Vygotsky and its offshoots, the text—represented by written language, personal narrative, and cultural relations—appears as a symbolic tool that reshapes consciousness and the self.

This study seeks to explore the similarities and differences between the text as an interpretive tool for Gadamer and the text as a symbolic medium in cultural psychology, with the aim of highlighting how the text can be a space for understanding the self through two dimensions: philosophical and interpretive, on the one hand, and psychological and cultural, on the other.

Presentation

In Gadamer's hermeneutics, we find that the text is merely a fixed vessel for a fixed meaning, but rather a space in which meaning is renewed by the renewal of the dialogue between the reader and the text. The self can only understand itself through a horizon of integration where the past meets the present. That is, the text bears a historical-linguistic character that interprets a continuous process of reconstructing meaning and understanding the self[1].

In other words, the text explains a symbolic issue in modern hermeneutics: Is the text merely a vessel for a ready-made meaning, or is it an open space whose connotations are renewed with every act of interpretation? Gadamer rejects the classical conception that considers the text a carrier of a fixed meaning awaiting discovery, and believes that the text transcends being a repository of meaning to become a living arena for interaction and renewal[1].

Gadamer's concept of horizon fusion suggests that the reader comes to a text bearing his or her own cultural and historical horizon, but the text itself represents another historical horizon. Understanding



is only achieved through the interaction of these two horizons—that is, the encounter between the past, represented by the text and tradition, and the present, represented by the reader. Here, it becomes clear that the self does not understand itself in isolation, but rather through dialogue with texts that represent historical and cultural traditions[1].

Here, we find the strength of the argument in Gadamer's interpretive project lies in its emphasis on the dynamism of understanding and its highlighting of the historical-cultural dimension of the text. For Gadamer, the text is not a carrier of static meaning, but rather a living space for interpretation. The self only becomes aware of itself through the fusion of horizons, which makes understanding an ongoing historical-linguistic process. This vision makes the text a tool for the formation of self- and cultural awareness, not merely an object for reading[1].

In cultural psychoanalysis, we find Vygotsky and his students (Luria, Bruns, and Wertsch) viewing the text as a symbolic tool that organizes thought and reshapes the psychological structure. Personal narratives, represented by writing and written language, are not neutral, but rather cultural psychological tools that grant the individual the ability to gain insight into themselves. Cultural psychoanalysis emphasizes that the self is not only constructed internally, but also through engagement with symbolic systems such as cultural texts, social discourse, and language[2].

Written texts and language are not merely a means of communication or conveying meaning. Rather, they are understood within the framework of cultural psychoanalysis as symbolic tools that contribute to organizing thought, reshaping the individual's internal psychological structure, and granting the self the ability to reflect. Vygotsky distinguished between material tools, such as a hammer and psychological tools such as language, symbols, and numbers. Texts, whether written, narrative, or discourse, are cultural psychological tools that play a role in reorganizing mental processes. These tools do not operate solely at the individual level, but are derived from culture and are internally re-psychologized[3].

The text rejects the individualistic conception of the self as in some classical psychological schools, and that the self, according to this perspective, is not only an internal biological product, but also a product of engagement in symbolic systems such as cultural texts, such as books, myths, and literature, and social discourse such as dialogue, discussion, and public discourse. This reflects the essence of the Vygotskian idea that consciousness is formed socially and culturally and then internally recreated[4].

Analysis and Criticism

By studying this topic, we can identify points of agreement and disagreement, and how to combine the two. We find that both Gadamer and cultural psychology agree that the self cannot be understood in isolation from the text. For Gadamer, it is through historical interpretation, and for cultural psychology, it is through symbolic mediation. Both reject the individualistic conception of the self and believe that meaning is formed within a cultural-linguistic context[5].

While Gadamer proceeds from a hermeneutic philosophical perspective that focuses on the conditions of historical understanding, cultural psychology proceeds from a structural functional perspective that focuses on the psychological impact of symbolic tools in shaping consciousness. For Gadamer, the text represents a continuous field of dialogue, while for Vigoszeki and the cultural school, the text represents a tool for organizing mental processes and self-awareness[2].

Through this, we find that the text carries two complementary dimensions. The first is a philosophical, contemplative dimension, as the text opens horizons for understanding the self through history and language. The second is a psychological, cultural dimension, in which we find that the text reorganizes the self through tangible symbolic mediation such as writing, narration, and language[1].

Conclusion

Through studying this topic, I reached the following conclusions:

- The text represents a dual medium for understanding the self, as, according to Gadamer's thought, it represents a space for historical interpretation that reveals hidden dimensions of the reader's identity.
- In cultural psychology, the text represents a symbolic tool that reconstructs consciousness and grants the individual the ability to self-reflect.
- Combining the two perspectives expands our understanding of the self, as the concern can only be achieved through the symbolic interplay with the historical and the cultural, with the psychological. This makes the text an essential tool in human studies, not as an isolated individual, but as an entity living within a network of symbols and cultural traditions.

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